
POPULAR SUPERSTITIONS OF RUSSIA.

Man is in all countries the slave of superstitions. Implanted in the cradle, nurtured with every feeling of the mind, reason is not strong enough to eradicate them; and the wisest and the best, in common with the weakest and the worst, bow to an influence which they may despise, but which they must obey. In England and in most parts of the continent of Europe, these superstitions are kept out of sight; old women and children alone talk of them—men feel them—but are silent. In Russia they form too prominent a part of the national character to be concealed. An ingenious traveller there, says, he has met Russians who abandoned themselves to habitual drunkenness, and all its disgusting consequences, without hesitation: but who would have suffered martyrdom rather than smoke tobacco, alleging, as a reason, that sentence in the Holy Scriptures which says, that what enters the mouth of man pollutes him not, but only that which issues from it! Even in the higher, and more enlightened classes, many persons will at this day be found, who cannot be persuaded to eat pigeons, because they resemble the form under which the Holy Ghost is painted in the churches.

It is a precaution very necessary to be observed at table, by no means to ask a friend to help you to salt; because, unless he smiles as he gives it he will inevitably quarrel with you. A stranger would also fall into a great mistake, if he should think a child pretty, and tell its mother so; for if she did not immediately spit on the child, she would believe that this admiration would bring on it the greatest disasters; and the luckless wight who thought he had recommended himself to the mother's good graces, would find himself detested by her. Monday is considered by them a most unlucky day, and one on which nothing should be begun. This is the only one of the Russian popular superstitions that I feel disposed to accord with; and, as the creation of this breathing world of ours, was begun on a Monday, it may account for all the disasters which have befallen it, from the deluge to the present moment.